

# **DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION IN MUSICAL PARTNERSHIPS**

**Evaluation report *The Operaflat*,  
a project by Yo! Opera Festival**

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## Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I worked on the evaluation of the *The Operaflat*, a project that was given shape by Yo! Opera and that was performed during the festival that was part of the project on November 3, 2007 in Utrecht. Purpose of the research of the lectorate Lifelong Learning in Music was monitoring and evaluating the dialogue between students and teachers of conservatoires on the one hand and the cooperation with a professional organisation (Yo! Opera) on the other. The research has increased my knowledge of the world of community opera and by monitoring the working process, I have gained insight into the complexity of setting up a project of this kind.

I would like to thank Anthony Heidweiller and Debora Patty for the discussions I had with them about *The Operaflat*. Debora also helped me by giving me extensive project information and by arranging classrooms where I could do my interviews. I would also like to thank the teachers and students who participated in this research, by means of interviews or by completing the questionnaires. Without their input it would have been impossible to evaluate the project. I also owe thanks to Bob Zimmerman, Caspar Nieuwenhuis, Giselle Vegter, Peggy Olislaegers and Daphne de Bruin for their willingness to help me with my interviews.

And last, I would like to give a warm thanks to Peter Mak for his contribution to the research. He helped me on the way to writing a solid research plan and he also supported me during the whole process by giving useful pointers for improvements. I appreciate his help and really enjoyed our inspirational discussions.

Hilke Bressers

## Summary

Yo! Opera asked the Lectorate Lifelong Learning in Music to evaluate the project *The Operaflat*, which was part of the fourth edition of the Yo! Opera Festival in Utrecht, in 2007. During the project primary school pupils of the public primary school 'Openbare Basisschool Overvecht', residents of the '*Operaflat*', vocal and composition students of a number of Dutch conservatoires and their teachers met during the performance of 25 mini operas that lasted one minute.

Purpose of the research of the lectorate was monitoring and evaluating the dialogue between students and teachers of conservatoires on the one hand and the cooperation with a professional organisation (Yo! Opera) on the other hand.

By being present at various rehearsals, giving out questionnaires and doing interviews with the singers, composers, teachers and employees of Yo! Opera, next to giving an account of the assessment of the project, I have tried to create a clear picture of the dialogue that took place between the parties. I also researched how the work process went of realising and performing mini operas. The following research questions have been answered:

1. How was *The Operaflat* assessed by Yo! Opera, the vocal and composition students and their teachers?
2. How did the communication go between these parties?
3. To what degree does this project contribute to the emancipation of the creative process of opera on the one hand and to the realisation of the essence of 'community opera' by students on the other hand?

Summarizing, it can be said that the project was assessed as very positive by all parties involved. Communication went well, but could be improved in certain areas. The emancipation of the creative process of opera could do with more attention for a following edition of *The Operaflat*, by making this target more clear, and by putting more focus on the *understanding* of this target by those involved, for example by organising a 'taster workshop'. Concerning the realisation of the essence of community opera by the students the following can be said: the students experienced only part of what is involved in the organisation of community opera, because they missed the phase of 'recruiting front doors' in the flat and that of writing the libretti by pupils of the primary school. Nevertheless, the interviews show that the students gained a better insight into the possibilities of projects like this through their experiences with *The Operaflat*, and also into the role that they themselves could play in this. Nearly half the students gained new insights into professional possibilities because of this project. Moreover, students feel encouraged to set up educational projects themselves in future.

## 1. Introduction

The Lectorate Lifelong Learning in Music<sup>1</sup> is a shared lectorate of the Prince Claus Conservatoire (Hanzehogeschool) in Groningen and the Royal Conservatoire (Hogeschool van Beeldende Kunsten, Muziek en Dans) in The Hague. The lectorate researches the concept of *Lifelong Learning* and its meaning for musicians. Future professional musicians should be able to function in a flexible way in a rapidly changing professional practice. Conservatoires can anticipate in this by creating adaptive learning environments which give students the possibility to be responsive. Responsive in this context means exploring new possibilities for the professional practice, where the students learn to make connections between their musical abilities and the demands this new situation makes on them.

Yo! Opera asked the lectorate to evaluate the project *The Operaflat*, which was part of the fourth edition of the Yo! Opera Festival in 2007. During this project primary school pupils of the 'Openbare Basisschool Overvecht', residents of the '*Operaflat*', vocal and composition students of a number of Dutch conservatoires and their teachers met during the performance of 25 one minute mini operas. The young singers and composers received instructions during the trajectory to allow them to work with music in new ways: both in the creative process, where vocal and composition students worked together with pupils from the primary school, and during the performance, where the singers were confronted with the performance in an unusual setting.

Because of her expertise in the area of adaptive learning environments and partnerships, the lectorate was asked to focus on the relationship student-student, student-teacher and the cooperation from these organisations with Yo! Opera<sup>2</sup>. As such the research is part of the larger lectorate project Partnerships.

By being present at various rehearsals, handing out questionnaires and doing interviews with the singers, composers, teachers and employees of Yo! Opera, next to reflecting the appreciation for the project, I have tried to create a clear picture of the dialogue which took place between the various parties. Furthermore, I did research into the working process of the creation and the performance of the small operas.

With this report the lectorate hopes to contribute to the thinking about new steps that can be taken during future projects, such as *The Operaflat*. For this earlier research into this area can be used.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, visit [www.lifelonglearninginmusic.org](http://www.lifelonglearninginmusic.org)

<sup>2</sup> Because of this the role primary school pupils and residents of the flat played in the project was not part of the focus of this research.

## 2. Description of the project

### Yo! Opera Festival

The Yo! Opera Festival allows children and young people to become acquainted with special forms of opera which appeal to them. With special projects and a biennial international youth opera festival it builds bridges between opera and a young and wider audience. From October 31 to November 4, 2007 the 4th edition of the Yo! Opera Festival took place. The festival tries to stimulate people (children, young people *and* adults) to discover their own unique voice. It deals with opera that is planted firmly in the middle of society and in which people start a dialogue with their (social) environment with their voice. Part of the programme was *The Operaflat*, a project in which residents of the area, school children and opera makers met each other in a music theatrical creative process.

### *The Operaflat*

During the project *The Operaflat* the residents of a flat in Utrecht took one or two singers into their home for a day. Pupils of the public primary school, 'Openbare Basisschool Overvecht' wrote libretti, to which composers who study at Dutch conservatoires wrote a mini opera of one minute. Young singers (also from the conservatoires) sang these mini operas in the doorways of the apartments in the flat, as a guest of the residents. This way couples were formed, consisting of pupil, composer and one or two singers. Each of the 25 little operas dealt with a specific situation (meeting) that can occur in a doorway and that was made up by the children. Visitors were invited to discover this music theatrical domain in the form of a game (of legitimized doorbell ringing). The audience was invited to go along the galleries of the flat and ring the doorbells; the door would then open and the singer would sing a mini opera especially for them. Every hour all singers came out of the doors like cuckoo's in a clock to give a brief 'vocal signal' together with the residents and the visitors (a brief composition, sung together every hour by everyone present in the flat).

In addition to a number of general starting points of *The Operaflat*, Yo! Opera connects the following targets specifically to the opera makers (young composers and singers):

- Broadening the horizon of young (opera)makers by working together in a social context;
- Letting young composers and singers become acquainted with the specific demands of community-opera;
- Making young singers aware of their own improvisation talent in a community-project.

Anthony Heidweiller, artistic leader of Yo! Opera, adds: 'That everyone (children, singers, composers, residents, teachers) sees what the power is of this kind of projects on location. This is important for the emancipation of youth opera and of the students,

children and residents. Within the opera world people see this kind of project as scary. I hope that we can take away the fear of chaos en coincidence.'

Yo! Opera wants to make the students feel that opera is not just about singing. It is important that young singers become aware of the contents of what they are singing and that they also become acquainted with unusual settings. The students learn that as a singer you are also autonomous, and more than just the performer of something someone else created. Singers are being made aware of their own 'colour', that they can contribute to the whole. In this project 'non-formal learning' is a central element. It can be described as 'all organised educational activity outside the formal system', in this project given shape by means of workshops that were given outside the conservatoire.

### **Process description**

Between February and late March 2007 vocal and composition students have been recruited at various conservatoires. The singers and composers that finally took part in the project were students from the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague, the Codarts Conservatoire in Rotterdam, the Conservatoire of Amsterdam, ArtEZ in Zwolle, the Utrechts Conservatoire, the Fontys Conservatoire in Tilburg and the Prince Claus Conservatoire in Groningen. On May 11 the student couples met each other and the pupils of the primary school 'Openbare Basisschool Overvecht'. The libretti that were written by the pupils were also handed to the students this day. The composers had, in some cases supported by the singers, until the beginning of August to put the libretti to music. On May 12 there was a workshop day for the young singers and composers, under supervision of Anthony Heidweiller and Niels Vermeulen (workshop composers) and of Luc Boyer and Hans Man in 't Veld (workshop singers). On June 25 and 26 Anthony Heidweiller visited three conservatoires to discuss the progress of the process<sup>3</sup>. Because the academic year of the other participating conservatoires was already being concluded, he did not manage to speak to the other teachers and students. On September 22 and 23 musical rehearsals by singers and composers took place at the primary school 'Overvecht', under supervision of Bob Zimmerman. Primary school pupils and the residents of *The Operaflat*, had also been invited to come and watch. Some of the rehearsals on September 23 were part of the Cultural Sunday via the Community Art Lab<sup>4</sup>. On October 29 and 30 Yo! Opera organised direction rehearsals for the singers and composers. Supervised by the four professional directors Caspar Nieuwenhuis, Giselle Vegter, Peggy Olislaegers and Daphne de Bruin scenic work was done on the operas with the singer – composer couples. After the final rehearsal on November 2, the performance took place on November 3 in the flat on the Faustdreef in Utrecht.

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<sup>3</sup> Namely: Codarts Rotterdam, Royal Conservatoire The Hague and ArtEZ Zwolle.

<sup>4</sup> The Cultural Sunday is an initiative of the council of Utrecht, which provides a monthly selection of cultural and recreational events (free of charge) to a diverse audience. The Community Art Lab (CAL) is a research- and experimental production centre which stimulates the understanding of community art and a durable quality increase in this. In order to realise this CAL organises public events and meetings between artists, students, policy advisers and other parties interested in community art.

## The research

### *Research questions*

This research report evaluates how Yo! Opera, the participating students and the teachers assessed the project *The Operaflat* and how communication between the various parties went. Various aspects of the work process will be dealt with. For this the following questions will be answered:

1. How was *The Operaflat* assessed by Yo! Opera, the vocal and composition students and their teachers?
2. How did communication between these parties go?
3. To what degree does this project contribute to the emancipation of the creative process of opera on the one hand and to the awareness of the essence of community opera by students on the other hand?

In order to answer question 3 the following sub categories were researched: expectations and experiences, the place of the project within conservatoires, professional possibilities, learning moments, commitment and ownership.

### *Research methods*

1. In-depth interviews during the process with 15 students who represent the various conservatoires (total number of students: 60);
2. Questionnaires completed afterwards by 16 other vocal and composition students;
3. Interviews with workshop leaders vocal and direction;
4. Interviews with the involved people of Yo! Opera;
5. Telephone interviews and written questionnaires with 12 of the 15 teachers involved after the project (with a list of questions);
6. Observation of the discussions between the project organisation and three conservatoires (teachers, students) on 25 and 26 June '07;
7. Observation of the work weekend on 22 and 23 September, of the direction rehearsals on 29 October and 1 November and of the final rehearsal on 2 November;
8. Observation during the performance on 3 November;
9. Studying communication (including agreements) between Yo! Opera and the students and teachers.

### *Data-analysis*

The research questions served as a guideline in the presentation of the findings. The central theme in all research questions has taken into account the perspective of all those involved (teachers, students, workshop leaders, Yo! Opera). The research especially took a closer look at similarities and discrepancies in the statements of these various parties. Next to this recommendations were made for certain issues that may require attention in follow up projects of *The Operaflat*.



### 3. Evaluation of *The Operaflat*

In order to evaluate *The Operaflat* questionnaires were made and interviews were held with the singers, composers, workshop leaders, teachers and employees of Yo! Opera. The process was also monitored by being present at rehearsals that took place during the project. The in-depth interviews with students took place between October 29 (the first day of the direction rehearsals) and the week of the final performance. After the project questionnaires were sent to all participating vocal and composition students in order to evaluate the project as a whole. The interview with Bob Zimmerman took place before the second musical rehearsal day. The directors were interviewed during the direction rehearsal days. All involved teachers received a questionnaire after the project, which they could complete or answer by telephone. In the middle of the project there was an interview with Yo! Opera's Debora Patty (of Yo! Opera education / production), which took place during the direction rehearsal days. Afterwards there was an evaluative discussion with both her and Anthony Heidweiller (artistic leader Yo! Opera) together.

#### **Assessment of the project**

In this paragraph I indicate how the various parties involved assessed the project. The project as a whole will be assessed first. The students were asked to grade the project in order to indicate whether they thought it was a success and whether they would partake in a project like this again. I asked the teachers of the conservatoires if they would stimulate their students to partake in a project like this a second time. Second, I researched how the various elements of *The Operaflat* trajectory were assessed by the students and by Yo! Opera. Comments and suggestions for improvement are included here.

#### *Assessment of the project as a whole*

Yo! Opera grades the project as a whole with an 8,5 on a scale from 1-10. Anthony Heidweiller and Debora Patty are happy with the way the day of the final performance went. Heidweiller notes about the trajectory that it took some time before there was a sense of ownership among the singers. And as concerns the composers, Heidweiller feels that some of them were involved in the project, but that others backed out. For a following *The Operaflat*, Yo! Opera would like to see the creativity coming more from the people involved in the project. By developing a framework in which people can think freely, Heidweiller hopes to give participants a greater degree of ownership of the project.

The vocal and composition students also assessed the project with an average of 8,5. To the question whether they would have like support from other parties (for example from teachers or through workshops) during the process, all students answered that they did not: they received all the support they needed. Various students indicated that the enthusiasm of Yo! Opera was important for their own enthusiasm about the project. A student suggests to do Heidweillers recruitment for a next project at the conservatoires during a compulsory lesson, so there will be more people. A number of students indicates

that they have doubts about the degree in which the residents of the area have really been reached. They say that for a next project people should work even harder to reach this target. Many students feel that the time in which the project takes place could be different a next time: because the summer vacation was in the middle of the project, there was a lot of time between rehearsals. A student remarks: 'Considering the timing I would have preferred the days to be a little closer together. Now it was a project that only came to life for me if I had an actual rehearsal. In between you have so many things on your mind.' Patty also indicates that for a next project she would make a time schedule without a summer vacation in the middle.

The average grade the teachers give the project as a whole is an 8,8, which is above the other assessments. The teachers think *The Operaflat* is 'original', 'a great success' and 'very well organised'. 'It gives the students a very good and very valuable experience.' A teacher thinks it is a pity that Yo! Opera was very strict about attendance in the beginning, while it turned out later that many students missed rehearsals. This way a number of her students missed the project. More teachers noted that the quality of the performances was very dissimilar. One teacher feels the compositions are 'too musically alike each other, not very adventurous and safe.' He thinks it might help next time to create differences beforehand, by making categories that concern technical form and themes. He feels also the use of galleries in the flat and of attributes could be improved. Several teachers and students think it is a shame that the time they put into the project bears little relation to the performance of just one day. A student says: 'The performance took a lot of preparation, and was of a good level because of this. To have just the Saturday afternoon for the performance is not much for all our trouble, I think.' A teacher indicates that he would like to be involved in thinking about doing the project on a larger scale (also of audience) and about getting greater support in a number of cities: 'It is important to connect *The Operaflat* to a national phenomenon. How can you increase the scale of the project in such a way that the quality and the educational aspect of it remain intact?' Three teachers did not want to grade the project because they felt they were not in a position to assess it properly.

While Heidweiller says that the 'vocal signal' (a sung brief composition, sung together by everyone present in the flat every hour) was very important and worked very well, some students and teachers clearly have a different opinion about this. They felt the signal was not 'catchy' and not very well prepared. A teacher called the vocal signal 'a failed attempt which brought down the quality of the whole production. I have the idea that it was underrated; the meaning/necessity was lacking. For a next time this had better be left out, rather than to perform it in this way.' A student suggests writing a kind of score to the flat across the street, with large sheets of paper. 'You can turn these galleries into a few staves and then the whole group would be able to read it from *The Operaflat*.'

All students said that in principle they would like to partake in a following project by Yo! Opera. Almost 30% of them indicates that their participation does depend on available time and/or interest concerning the project. Of the teachers 90% said they would encourage their students to participate in a comparable project, and 60% said they would

do this in a very enthusiastic way. 10% of the teachers said this depends on how well the students and the projects match.

#### *Assessment workshops 11 and 12 May*

Friday May 11 was the day of the first meeting. The student couples vocal and composition met each other, and the meeting with the pupil who wrote the libretto and the handing over of the libretto by the child to his/her composer or singer took place during a lunch. On Saturday May 12 there were workshops for the students. The composers had workshops given by Anthony Heidweiler and Niels Vermeulen and the singers attended workshops by Luc Boyer and Hans Man in 't Veld.

The lunch on May 11, where the students got to meet their pupils and where the libretti were exchanged, was experienced as essential by all students, even if the situation was uncomfortable for a considerable group. Various suggestions have been made to give a different shape to the contact with the child for a next time. 'The lunch could be more of a lunch and does not have to happen in a gym in some distant location' and 'Perhaps it is a good idea to organise some kind of activity with the children, in which groups of singer + composer + child receive an assignment, such as an organised hunt or another sports event, so you can get to know each other better during this activity. To sit around a table with a child and talk was a bit unnatural.'

Two thirds of the students assess the workshop as positive (60% singers and 40% composers). Various singers indicate that they noticed later, during the direction rehearsals, that the workshops in May were very useful. The organisation of Yo! Opera says that according to them the singers had a turn around during these days concerning their commitment to the project. All negative responses (33%) came from the composers. They felt the days were too long, the workshops uncomfortable and not relevant for their role in the project. Heidweiler and Patty were also less satisfied about the workshops that were organised for the composers. For a following edition of the project they would like to let the composers work closer together at this stage with the singers, rather than offer them separate workshops.

#### *Assessment musical rehearsals 22 and 23 September*

The musical rehearsals took place on 22 and 23 September in the primary school 'Openbare Basisschool Overvecht', under guidance of Bob Zimmerman. Each couple had one hour during one of the rehearsal days to rehearse their miniature opera musically, while Zimmerman gave instructions to singers as well as composers. During the rehearsals the other singers and composers present also got the chance to see the work of the other couples and to listen to it. After the singers had sung the piece once, the composer (if present) got the opportunity to say what he/she thought of the performance and if there were issues for improvement. Then Zimmerman gave his instructions. He focussed on asking questions from the composers about why they made certain choices, and he gave the singers instructions about how to bring depth to their characters and improve the vocal exchange.

60% of all students (divided equally among singers and composers) appreciates the musical rehearsals. Some remarks: 'Nice to have worked on text interpretation.' And: 'Zimmerman says very sensible things and is very musically exact.' 'Nice to hear other compositions', and 'nice, interesting, instructive and confronting, but eventually did not change anything essential about the interpretation or creation of my composition.'

A quarter of the students (85% singers, 15% composers) are negative about the rehearsals. 'I could have done this at a singing lesson and not have bothered to come to Utrecht for it.' 'Zimmerman was very strict with us and sometimes he was not nice to the singers. But a musical rehearsal like this is necessary and good', and 'I had had the music for three days at that time and had barely had the time to study it. Because of this I did not feel at ease. Bob was immediately on top of me and at that moment that did not feel right at all. Also not towards my composer.' They also indicate that the singers would like to have their own rehearsal room. 10% of the students are neutral about the rehearsals and 5% of the students who received the questionnaire were not present.

*Assessment direction- and final rehearsals 29 October and 1 and 2 November*

The rehearsals took place on 29 October and 1 November in ZIMIHC, venue for amateur arts in Utrecht. The general rehearsals of 2 November partly took place here and partly in the Cultural Centre Parnassos in Utrecht. The students were allocated one of these two days for the direction rehearsals. Guided by professionals directors Caspar Nieuwenhuis, Giselle Vegter, Peggy Olslaegers and Daphne de Bruin the singer-composer couples worked scenically on the mini opera's during the rehearsals. Nieuwenhuis and De Bruin chose to work with the couples individually, while Vegter and Olslaegers worked with groups. The interviews for this research with the directors took place during the rehearsal days.

The directors each had their own ideas about what they wanted to teach their students. Nieuwenhuis wanted to teach the students 'an awareness of space' and he thinks it is important to stay close to yourself as a character. It has to be completely clear to the audience who the characters are. Vegter worked on the 'development of meaning in the text and playing with this. She feels that by analysing the text the vocals work better. Olslaegers let the singers play with the fact that the audience in this project is close to the performers. 'You have to work with this as a singer, for example by using focus. Moreover the audience in the flat does not know theatrical codes, so it gives meaning to everything itself. The singers have to be aware of this: you cannot deny that you are in Overvecht in the here and now.' Olslaegers also felt that discovering the different layers in the opera was important. De Bruin puts emphasis on the fact that the performance lasts only one minute: 'The brief nature of the operas and the fact that they are repeated, makes that the students can experiment with their characters.'

All students are positive to very positive about the direction rehearsals. The students indicate that they feel they have worked in a pleasant way on emotion, interpretation, acting ('less is more' and 'timing'). 'It gave a different dimension to our piece, there is much more to those little pieces than you first think.' 'Inspirational', and 'very nice to go deeper into the characters.' 'These were the most useful rehearsals. Especially because of the practical experience that a lot of us miss.' Yo! Opera itself was also positive about the rehearsals: 'During the direction rehearsals we really worked towards the end result!'

A number of students who took part in the joint direction rehearsals of Vegter or Olislaegers felt it was too much to ask for them to be present at the rehearsals for the whole day, when they heard that students of De Bruin or Nieuwenhuis were allowed to go home after an hour of individual work. However, a large part of the students indicated they found it very pleasant to have a warming-up together, and to see the other pieces.

All four directors felt the organisation and supervision from Yo! Opera was good. They note that the students received solid preparation and that the music was well rehearsed before the performance. This allowed everyone to work fast. Three of the four directors feel that direction should be included in an earlier stage of the process, for example at the moment the text is being put to music. For a next time the purpose of the project should be more embedded, so that the *why* of *The Operaflat* becomes clearer for the student. It is also noted that the assignment is too complex for the short time students have been able to work on it. The directors largely gave shape to the interpretation of the characters, while there would be a good role for the students in this.

## **Communication**

For the evaluation of this project it is important to see how effective the dialogue has been during the project. Communication has determined in how far the various parties were made aware of the contents of the project, the course of the trajectory and the role they were considered to play. What does Yo! Opera think about the way they distributed the information? And to what extent are students and teachers happy about how communication went with Yo! Opera and vice versa? These questions will be answered in the following paragraphs.

### *Communication between Yo! and the students*

On behalf of Yo! Opera, Deborah Patty was responsible for the practical organisation and communication within the project. She indicates that she is happy about the way communication went, but says she was sometimes afraid of sending too much information. 'But on the other hand, this information was all necessary. I wonder if all students read their emails properly, though. I sometimes got questions about issues that had been mentioned in my emails at least three times(...). For a next time I would like to use a weblog to keep the various parties informed of the course of events. This way the children, residents and the students would have a clear picture of what is happening.'

The students are very happy about the communication with Yo! Opera. The average grade they give is 8,5. The students felt the stream of information was very clear. The project was well organised and they very much appreciated that Patty was always available for their questions. The students were also happy about the degree of contact there was with the organisation. A number of times it is mentioned specifically that the food and drink was organised so well.

#### *Communication between Yo! and conservatoires*

Heidweiller indicates that he spoke to directors of Dutch conservatoires in the autumn of 2006. 'They often thought the idea was great,' he says, 'but they neglected to pass on the information to their teachers. At the beginning of the project there was a lot for us to do, concerning this; the unfamiliarity with the project was not conducive. Now it is important to maintain the contacts. We want to keep involving the teachers during the year in between and with the following festival in 2009.'

Around the time of the rehearsals in May 2007 a number of singers resigned. The teachers of the conservatoires were asked to recruit new students. Teachers were informed about the course of the project, because they also received all correspondence that went out to the students. The teachers also received an evaluation by mail about the work in September 2007 and the involvement of their own students.

According to Heidweiller and Patty there was not enough contact with the teachers in the phase between 11 and 12 May and the day the composition had to be handed in. This was an important period in which the work process of the composers and teachers took place and according to Yo! Opera, this has no proper place within the conservatoires yet<sup>5</sup>. For the following edition of *The Operaflat* they want to spend more time on supervising the work process, in which the compositions are created. Heidweiller further indicates that he would have liked to see all teachers during the performance on November 3. 'A great number of them were missing,' he says.

Three quarters of all teachers assesses the information from Yo! Opera as very positive, and 20% as good. One teacher says he did not receive all information, because he got involved in the project too late. Another teacher missed certain pieces of information during the performance: there was no information in the flat about the compositions or about those involved. He feels this is important for the vocal and composition students, in order to make a name for themselves. All teachers felt there was enough contact between Yo! Opera and the conservatoires, but one teacher said she was not sure that Yo! Opera experienced the same.

#### *Communication between students and teachers*

In most cases it was the teachers who alerted the students to *The Operaflat* and the information meetings Anthony Heidweiller gave at the conservatoires. For the majority of composition students, writing a composition for *The Operaflat* was part of their principal

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<sup>5</sup> In the agreement that was signed by Yo! Opera Festival and the conservatoires it says under the heading 'contribution conservatoire': 'The (principal subject) teacher supervises the participating students from the conservatoire: Assistance and coaching during the writing of the composition or the rehearsing of the aria'.

subject, which is why in these cases there was regular contact between student and teacher. In other cases the composers wrote their composition without supervision from their teachers. The amount of contact there was between vocal students and their teachers depended for the greater part on the need of the singer. In all cases time was taken during the principal subjects of the singers to work on the piece, if the singer asked for this. The singers who did not receive support at the conservatoire indicate that they did not need this. As has been mentioned before, none of the students felt there had to have been greater supervision at the conservatoire; the support given by Yo! Opera was considered sufficient.

### ***The Operaflat: work process and essence***

For the evaluation of *The Operaflat*, the work process of the students was monitored closely. The expectations and experiences of Yo! Opera, the students and teachers are reflected in this paragraph. One of the targets of *The Operaflat* was ‘the emancipation of the singer in the work process of creating a composition’. In this paragraph we look at whether this target was met. We also look in a broader sense at whether students understood the essence of ‘community opera’ and at the place of projects such as *The Operaflat* within conservatoires, and whether it is desirable for the future to incorporate projects like these into the curriculum. We also take a closer look at the relevance of the project: does participation in *The Operaflat* give new perspectives into the practice of the profession according to the students and the teachers, and did the students learn anything from the project? Finally we asked the students how happy they are about their own degree of involvement in the project *The Operaflat*. Because the degree of ownership has an influence on the commitment to the project, we also assessed in how far Yo! Opera, students and teachers felt owners of *The Operaflat*.

#### *Expectations and experiences*

When asked what Yo! Opera wanted to accomplish with this project, Heidweiller answered: ‘That everyone (children, singers, composers, residents and teachers) would see the power of this kind of location projects. It is important for the emancipation of youth opera, and also of students, children and residents.’

Heidweiller had different expectations about the cooperation between singers and composers. During the first meeting and in letters he says it was explained that the vocal and composition students would work together on creating a composition, but that this message did not come across. When the students were asked to describe what was expected of them during the project<sup>6</sup> they gave the following answers: ‘Rehearsing and performing the music, supported by direction’; ‘write an opera minute that could be sung and stay close to the lyrics in this’; ‘writing music to lyrics of children and working together with vocal students of my conservatoire.’ Five students indicated that they did not know what to expect from the project, because their idea about it was unclear in the beginning. On hindsight, they experience the project as much grander, exciting and more

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<sup>6</sup> The student interviews took place between 29 October (direction rehearsals) and the week after the performance. That is why future tense as well as past tense are used.

fun than they expected, also because of the good supervision by Yo! Opera. Another student remarks: 'Anthony is very single minded in his enthusiasm, he knows very well what he wants. This makes that you also know what to expect.' Also mentioned are: 'giving the child the feeling that they are important' and 'enthusiasm,' 'commitment' and an 'open attitude' as expectations the students had.

In cases where the students' expectations do not match their experience, this largely concerns the contents of one of the various meetings. These are mentioned in the paragraphs that are specifically about the elements concerned. Only one student is disappointed about the project as a whole, and more specifically about the intensity of the project. He was a participant in earlier projects of Yo! Opera, which required more of his energy and concentration. 'After that we had really achieved something and I had a 'yes' feeling. I want to get more out of projects such as these.'

Heidweiller says that the role of the teachers was first to bring in students. And second, they would play a stimulating role: inspiring students and their creativity during singing and composing. Furthermore they would convey to the students that it was a serious project. He says teachers are important for the project to succeed; for example by taking care that there is a composition, and that the project is part of the lessons. Of all teachers 25% feels that their role was finding students. 70% of the teachers did recruit and supervise students and 5% did not want to answer this question. The image the teachers had about the role they would play largely concurs with their expectations.

#### *Emancipation work process opera*

One of Anthony Heidweiller's targets concerning *The Operaflat* has to do with the creative process of opera. In an ideal situation the composer would no longer write a piece unto itself, but would take into account his environment by involving this. The musician is supposed to be more than a medium who performs the composition. This means being involved in the writing process, but also: to support the final result for 100% and not hide behind composer, teacher etc.

During an intermediate meeting at the conservatoires in June 2007 Heidweiller says about his way of working in a joint creative process: 'The work process happens with several people and I want to hear from others what they are looking for (for example by having an informal evening where we talk about mutual interests). It is wonderful if the singer takes a step forward because of this project. But even if the singer is involved in the process, the composer is still holding the reigns. My way of working is to enter into a conversation with the singer with a clean slate, as it were, and ask for ideas, with a clear idea about where it is I want to go in the composition.' During the conversations it becomes clear that some composition students are very sceptical about this way of working. They are reluctant to share their ideas with the singer at a too early stage, because it can change their ideas that have not yet been fully formed in a way they do not like. One student says that this is the reason he does not want to have the singer's voice in his head: 'I did not hear the voice of the singer. In some way you have to be selfish. When I write I do not want to hear her voice in my mind. I want to have *my* picture, *my* view and in the end it's going to be fine because my idea is strong.' Another composer



indicates that the input of the singer comes with the performance: 'In the way she is performing the piece it will finally become her piece.'

Heidweiller emphasizes that the fear that someone else will undermine your idea, should not be a reason not to have a discussion. 'It is hard to fit the ideas of other people into your own, but you do not have to fit everything in. The composer carries the final responsibility and makes the final decision. It is not so much about writing together, but about the question who do you write for?' After the discussions Heidweiller says: 'I want to emancipate musicians, so they take responsibility for what they do on stage. This can be unusual for the composer, but it is essential for change.'

It later turns out that the composition students in most cases only asked the singers for minimal, technical vocal information. A composer says: 'A soprano is a soprano.' Most composers only sent their composition to the singers when there was already a first version. At that stage it was still possible for them to check whether it was a piece that they could sing. Striking in this context is that more than half of the composers answers emphatically that they involved the singers they wrote the composition for in the writing process. In all cases this involvement was not much more than to ask the singer for their vocal range and technical abilities and limits.

Remarkable is that most singers indicate that this passive role in the creative process is fine with them. 'The composer has to write. Surprise me,' says a singer about this. Only in a rare case does a singer hope to have more contact with the composer during the creative process next time. Only once two vocal students were actively involved in the creative process of the composition by, together with the composer, coming up with ideas for melodies and rhythms, and at a later stage by working on the composition together.

#### *Essence community art*

When asked after the project if he has the idea that the students understand the essence of community opera, Heidweiller answers with an emphatic no! Heidweiller: 'The students did not understand the trajectory of recruiting the flats and the work process with the children. To stand in a doorway on a Saturday and performing a piece gives no insight into this. They did get a taste of what community opera is. We did notice in May that the students were surprised and curious during the meeting with the children. This touched many singers.'

After leading the first musical day of rehearsal Bob Zimmerman feels that especially the composers have little idea about the meaning of community opera. He says: 'There is little reflection of the composers about what they are doing. What annoys me is that during supervision apparently there is very little reflection. Compositions are based on personal opinions, but at the moment you take part in a project such as this, as a composer you have to understand what you are doing and why. You cannot neglect these facts; you are working with children's texts, for a passing audience. The composer in this situation has to fulfil a purpose that serves both parties, either of whom is not on an equal footing with him. Community opera is not made for your own internal circle! It bothers me that the child and the audience are being pushed to the sidelines by the egocentric

attitude of the composer, who shows here he lacks social responsibility. Also reflection on the part of the teacher is lacking. Even on a very basic level mistakes are made and gaps in sheer workmanship become visible. Where was the teacher in all this?! The students are in the middle of a learning process. I don't blame them, but I do blame the teachers. Certainly if you see that Yo! is trying to help the students wherever they can.'

The four directors who supervised the rehearsals with the students had a difference of opinion before the performance. Casper Nieuwenhuis did not specifically consider the question whether students understand the essence of community opera. A combination of factors makes it community art, according to him. 'The basis remains the same as with a play in a theatre, you only work at a much smaller scale, so you do not use mimicry in the same way. The singers can keep their playing 'natural', but this is not the first impulse for many of them.' Nieuwenhuis tries to avoid sticking a label onto what community art means; he just wants to tell a story. As concerns working with children's lyrics, he thinks it important to not take these literally, something adults often tend to do. Especially children use their imagination, he says.

Giselle Vegter thinks the singers understood the essence of community opera after the performance. According to her it took some time before the students understood what it was about, and she was able to contribute to this in a positive manner herself by letting the students do things they did not normally do. She tried to let the singers step into the world of the children, in their imagination, by singing. Vegter thinks that the singers make a big step during the performance, both in the contact with the public that rings the doorbell, and with the residents of the flat.

Peggy Olislaegers thinks that the process in which the singers find themselves in this project does not end with the direction rehearsals; up until the performance the students are still growing. Only after the Saturday they have had a total experience with all layers that are part of the project. Olislaegers: 'The singers can then decide what appeals to them, what was not what they expected or was confusing, what the reaction of the audience was etcetera. This feedback is important.'

Daphne de Bruin thinks it important to wonder for whom the play should be relevant: the residents, the makers or the performers. She says: 'This project is especially important for the residents, and the interactive way the project is give shape. You give something to the residents they would not otherwise see; you make them look at reality in a different way and enjoy themselves.' De Bruin feels that the project was a success for the students if they experienced what it is like to perform in this way.

#### *Assimilation of the project at the conservatoires*

For the nine conservatoires that took part in *The Operaflat* it was checked whether the project was part of the conservatoire curriculum of the students. Only for the composition students in The Hague was it a requirement to take part in the project. All other students were encouraged by their teachers or took part on their own initiative. In Rotterdam the students were required to be present at the information meetings given by Heidweiller, but it was not required to take part in the project. In many cases time was reserved during

the principal subject composition to work on the opera for *The Operaflat*. A number of students voluntarily worked on their composition and also indicates not to have needed support. Two thirds of the singers took the piece to their singing lessons and the other singers did not consider this necessary. A number of conservatoires gave credits for taking part in the project, within the principal subject or as use of free space or extracurricular activity. Noteworthy is that some students did not know that they could get credits for the project.

Most students think it is a good idea to include projects like *The Operaflat* in the curriculum at the conservatoire, but as an optional subject. This is because most students feel that you have to participate from enthusiasm. A student suggests making it a tradition to give first years the opportunity to work on a Yo! Opera project. A singer says that projects like *The Operaflat* teach you to find ways to bring music to society. He says you see with your own eyes what it does with people. Someone else remarks that the practical performance of the pieces compels the composer to really finish a piece before a set deadline. This teaches students to work with deadlines, something that is not always self-evident to all composition students.

The impromptu nature of the project is named by several teachers as a reason why it is not a good idea to include projects like *The Operaflat* in the curriculum of conservatoire students. Also the diversity in students' interests goes against making this a required part of the curriculum. The teachers all say that in principle there is room for projects like these, but as part of a (principal) subject or as a work placement or orientation assignment. Many teachers value the flexible contents of the curriculum and feel that projects like these cannot be a fixed item of the curriculum. But you can certainly make time for a project like this. A teacher wants to introduce 'community art' projects in the curriculum of his school that is still to be developed.

#### *Professional possibilities*

A little more than half the students say that *The Operaflat* did not give them any new professional perspectives. Three students indicate that this has to do with their earlier experiences with community art projects. Forty percent of all students did experience a change. They say a project like this gives you ideas, that you can also organise projects with schools yourself. And that it opens your eyes for what is possible. One student says: 'I found that I loved the combination of singing with theatre very much.'

The majority of teachers think projects like *The Operaflat* are very important to students, considering their future professions. They made the following remarks: 'It gives new professional perspectives and it appeals to artistic possibilities and inventiveness of the students.' Another teacher says: 'Community art as far as I know, does not offer a professional work area for trained musicians as a place to start. It would be a very good thing if this working area would come into being and would grow. Conservatoires could play a very important part in this. I think it is of great importance in this that traditional conservatoires realize the importance of community art *and* that community art realizes the importance and the nature of a traditional conservatoire training, with its far reaching specialisation at a very high level. Only then can there be room for an important, positive

and mutually benefiting inspiration which leads to results.’ He also says: ‘Also the cooperation with the composer, song writers and in this case with a director is important. And finding solutions for issues that have to do with a presentation on location.’

### *Learning moments*

All students say they learned something from the project. Interacting and making contact with the public is mentioned frequently. Also the acting, and in a more specific sense, working with emotions and improvisation were learning moments for the vocal and composition students. A number of composers say that writing for and dealing with singers was a new experience for them, which they hope to profit from in the future. A few significant remarks are: ‘I am learning much more here than when I would rehearse five extra pieces for my principal subject’ and ‘It brings up questions, for example about our society. I also learned that opera does not have to be melodramatic, that you can keep it very natural in this setting’ and ‘I think that as a musician you have to make the audience sit at the edge of their seat, that you must not allow them to lean backwards. Because of this set up the audience was really involved, they could not hide and this gives a special kind of tension.’

### *Commitment and ownership*

Yo! Opera is very happy about the commitment of all vocal students. In the starting up phase everything went slowly, Heidweiller says. But eventually he feels the commitment of the vocal students was good. The commitment of the composition students was rather different: ‘Some of them were involved, others we did not see after the starting up phase.’ Heidweiller finds this difficult to understand.

Three quarters of all students assess their own commitment as ‘good’. Most students felt they put enough time into the rehearsals and feel that their presence at the Yo! Opera meetings was good. A number of students indicates that at first they were not very enthusiastic about the project, but that this changed during the direction rehearsals. Six students (as many composers as singers) feel that their commitment could have been better, because of lack of time or lack of challenge/interest. One of them says that his commitment was not 10 percent of what it could have been.

Heidweiller thinks that the various parties should get a greater degree of ownership for the project. ‘Because everything comes from us, I sometimes have my doubts. Then I wonder, can we get something back? But I always notice it takes time in this kind of projects.’ He feels it is important for a next time that everyone has room for a valuable contribution, and that changes take place within the conservatoire. ‘Only when people become familiar with the concept, do they get ownership and can you have a dialogue. Continuity is therefore very important.’

Many students do not have a sense of ownership, because they are only a small part in a larger whole. For the composers the length of one minute of the composition also plays a part. And also the singers sometimes don’t really feel responsible for the project, because they are only a part in a larger whole. One student: ‘If I fall ill someone else could replace me immediately.’ The fact that children play an important part in the project

makes that some students feel owner of the project in the sense that you cannot afford to quit because of the child. Only one student says she has a feeling of ownership, because she wants 'what we do to be good.'

The conservatoire teachers think they only played a small part in the project, especially concerning stimulating and guiding students. Some teachers feel that because of this their role was not important, while others felt they were able to contribute something valuable. A few reactions: 'I helped them find their own musical and theatrical energy and supported them in the further development of their musical and vocal abilities in the repertoire for the project' and 'I looked over their shoulder, listened, gave advice. Some students really liked that I came to watch in the flat. I think it is self evident that I should be present at what the students do.' A number of teachers says that their coaching role was not very different from the daily supervision of students during composing and singing.

Opinions differ about the question whether students needed support from the conservatoire for the project. Some teachers think the students did not need practical support, and that the idea was that they should be participating on their own. Others emphasize that this depends on the student him- or herself or they feel that supervision at the conservatoire is of great importance. A teacher: 'It is important for students to have a coach, who consults with him and supervises in this kind of project.' Half the teachers were present at the performance of *The Operaflat*. They are very happy with the project and with the enthusiasm of the performers as well as that of the public. A teacher: 'The project had allure, something really happened.' A number of teachers says that the quality of the opera's was very diverse. They also feel it is a pity that so few people saw it, in relation to the time that was spent on it. The teachers who could not be there were hindered because of overbooked agenda's or illness.

## 4. Conclusion and discussion

### How was *The Operaflat* assessed by Yo! Opera, the vocal and composition students and their teachers?

With an average grade of respectively 8,5, 8,5 and 8,8 *The Operaflat* was assessed very highly by all parties. The negative response that was given concerns especially time; the time allotted to the project and how it was spent. Concerning the time allotted Yo! Opera noted itself that for a next time it would strive to organise a project in a period without a summer holiday in between. This would make the project less fragmented and would contribute to a greater involvement from the students. Concerning the second, the large amounts of time the students spent on the project: the fact that the commitment of the composers was not what Yo! Opera expected it to be could have something to do with the fact that composers invested a lot of time in a composition that was allowed to last only one minute. For a next edition it should be made clearer what the challenge is for a composer in writing a miniature: it requires quite different skills than writing a longer composition. An additional consideration might be for a next Operaflat, to let fewer composers write more compositions, for example related to a theme. With this the composers would have a better outlet for their creativity and there would be relatively more attention for their pieces during rehearsals. This could lead to a greater sense of ownership and greater commitment. As it turned out, most singers did not really feel very responsible for the project either, because they each formed a small part of a bigger whole: 'If I would fall ill, I could be replaced immediately.' By increasing the students' input in the creative process itself, a greater sense of ownership could arise, even if their share in the performance of the project would stay the same.

The vocal signal (in this case a brief vocal composition without lyrics) which was performed once an hour by all singers and everyone present in the flat, is a part of *The Operaflat* that deserves some more attention. The composition could in the first place have a clearer connection to the contents of *The Operaflat*. The idea that was mentioned in the original project plan, to use the names of all residents in the composition, might be useful. Also you could hand out a paper to all visitors on entering the flat with the music of the 'vocal signal' and its meaning. The other side of the paper could be used to name the titles of the compositions and of all students and children who worked on the project. This way you also meet the wish of one of the teachers to have this information made available.

The lunch with the primary school children on May 11 was an uneasy occasion for a considerable number of students. Because of this, for a next time, Yo! Opera might like to come up with new ideas for this element. A suggestion of one student to divide the group into couples and do a 'hunt' or something 'sports like', could be a first step.

The evaluation of the contents of the workshops in May showed that one third of all composers had a negative experience of this. This may mean that the workshops lacked a useful learning experience for the composers. The lectorate's experience shows that *meaningful learning* is important: the workshops have to connect to that which students are trained for. The dissatisfaction the composers felt could have something to do with the fact that they could not sufficiently integrate the contents of the workshop into 'being a composer'. For putting together a future workshop, it might be better to focus on the question of how to teach composers new skills that they can use at a full scale for their identity as a composer. It might be possible to let the singers and composers, in agreement with Yo! Opera, take part in one workshop together, instead of two separate ones. During the workshop they might work on the purpose of emancipating the working process. A proposal for this can be found under the heading 'emancipation working process'.

Although 60 percent of all students appreciated the musical rehearsals, a quarter of them assessed them in a negative way. Most students feel that musical rehearsals are necessary, but they have a lot of criticism about the way Bob Zimmerman gave shape to these rehearsals: he was considered too strict. Perhaps the students' expectations played a part in this: Zimmerman did not only give musical directions as such to the singers and composers, but also challenged them to think about why they made certain choices. It may have scared the students off if they did not expect this kind of critical reflection. For a following edition it might be worth while to include questions like these in a reflection workshop, about which you will find more under the heading 'emancipation working process'. Also it was noticeable that Zimmerman became frustrated during rehearsals about the way the composers gave shape to their compositions, without in his opinion, taking into account the needs of those involved (children, inexperienced audience). The idea that the students were insufficiently supported reflectively was connected to this. There is a danger that this might be projected onto the students. This appeared to be the case on the second day, although Zimmerman himself was aware of the fact that the students were in the middle of a learning process. It makes sense to confront composers with a careless attitude, for example when musical punctuation marks are lacking or are used inconsistently. However, when it concerns the lack of a connection between the composition and, in this case, the libretto of the primary school pupil and a new audience, then the student has to get the chance to learn from his mistakes. For most composers writing in a community setting is not something they do every day.

The direction rehearsals were assessed as positive unanimously. It was remarkable to see that every director with his/her own expertise and in their own way knew how to inspire the students. Experience has shown the lectorate that the quality of coaching is very important. In this project, in which 'non-formal learning' in the form of workshops takes a central place, the coach (workshop leader) is the one who has to have insight into where the student is in his/her process, which are the next steps that could be taken and how he/she brings the student here by asking the right questions or give them suggestions. Several directors already worked with questions like these during the rehearsals. For a next time the way of coaching might receive specific attention, according to the concept mentioned above.

Also, noteworthy directions from the various directors could be collected in order to teach the student some general skills, and in this way transcend the knowledge of the individual director. These skills could be text analysis, how to give layers to a character and dealing in various ways with the available space. By thinking about a 'set of standards' Yo! Opera (together with the directors) could decide for itself what the essence of the workshop for the students should be.

### **How did the communication go between Yo! Opera, the vocal and composition students and their teachers?**

According to the students and the teachers communication with Yo! Opera was very effective. Both parties received all information they needed and are happy about the amount of information. Students and teachers are also happy about the personal contact there was. On looking back Yo! Opera itself would have preferred to have more contact with the students and the conservatoires during the working process (period between May and July). At any rate, it appears to be a good idea to have this whole process outside a summer holiday, as was noted before. It could also be an improvement to have more contact with the students and the teachers during this crucial phase of the project. The question that is important to Yo! Opera is whether she wants this phase to take place at the conservatoires, for example by employing teachers from a number of conservatoires as workshop leaders, or with the aid of centrally organised workshops.

Heidweiller remarked several times that according to him a change of attitude ought to take place within the conservatoires in relation to community art. If incorporation of the working process at the conservatoires is important to Yo! Opera, then they should also express what they expect from conservatoires in a project, in more concrete terms than 'assistance' and 'coaching' during the writing of a composition or the rehearsal of an aria. The teachers who were involved in the current project are largely of the opinion that they did what was required of them. The larger part of the teachers further indicates that they think projects like *The Operaflat* are very important for students, considering their future professions. All teachers also said that there is room within the existing curriculum for projects such as *The Operaflat*. So there appears to be a lot of goodwill in the conservatoires to cooperate in community art projects such as these.

Should Yo! Opera want to realise a larger contribution from the conservatoires for a next project such as *The Operaflat*, then a clear dialogue is of great importance. In the first place you avoid that teachers have different expectations of their share in the project than Yo! Opera, and in the second place asking a larger contribution can increase the sense of ownership among the participants.



**In how far does the project contribute to the emancipation process of the creative process of opera on the one hand, and to the awareness of the essence of ‘community opera’ by the students on the other hand?**

*Emancipation working process*

One of Anthony Heidweiller’s targets with *The Operaflat* concerns the creative process of opera. He wanted to teach the students that as a singer you are a creator and autonomous as well, and more than just the ‘performer’ of what others created. The singers and composers should both have had an active part in the writing- and creative process of the mini opera’s.

The evaluation shows that various composition students are uneasy when faced with the idea of taking the singer for whom they are writing the piece along in the creative process. Research by the lectorate shows that this attitude is rather exceptional: the greater part of composers usually likes to know who they are writing for and also focus their writing towards this. What also happens frequently is that composers wish, for artistic reasons, to write a specific composition for a specific performer. Apparently this did not really happen with that part of the *The Operaflat* composers that was uneasy about giving the singer a place in the creative process. It is important for a next edition of the project, to pay attention to the interaction between composers and singers, also by making clear agreements with the conservatoires.

The fact that the composers are ‘suspicious’ and the singers ‘indifferent’ towards a shared creative process (‘The composer has to compose, surprise me’) explains only partly why the singers did not play a more active role in bringing about the final mini opera’s. An explanation might be found in the set up of the project and the communication about this. To begin with the last: Heidweiller explained during a first meeting and during the meeting in May that both composers and singers should be playing an active role in the working process. In the project description of *The Operaflat* the general purpose of ‘Stimulating of collective creative processes in opera’ is mentioned, but not elaborated on further. It could indicate involving singers in the creative process, but also involving the pupils from the primary schools and the residents of the flats in the project.

If in a next edition of *The Operaflat* the ‘emancipation of the creative process of opera’ should again become the focal point of the project, it seems a good idea to make this clearer in the communication with all parties involved. This could be done by organising ‘taster’ workshops, in which teachers and students go to work with the workshop leader as a start of the project. From this they can try to find the *dialogue*, in which mutual expectations are expressed and which might result in agreements between Yo! Opera and others involved. These could be confirmed in a formal agreement document. Research of the lectorate shows that understanding the essence of a project happens when people start working this way together first.

Secondly, the set up of *The Operaflat* could be adapted by, as was mentioned earlier, giving the creative process a clearer role in the project. The composition students in most cases received support from their teachers at the conservatoire, if they so desired, while

writing the mini opera's, but Yo! Opera itself was not involved in putting the lyrics to music. Director Giselle Vegter gives a good example of a possible future work process: let the singers, the composers and the directors together improvise and make the music during a workshop. This also meets the wishes of several directors to be involved in the work process at an earlier stage. The 'frameworks' Heidweiller speaks of could indeed be the starting point in which students receive the freedom to work freely and creatively. It is worth considering to think beforehand about using themes, as a teacher suggests, in order to prevent thematic and musical monotony.

Heidweiller says in an interview after the project that 'everyone now understands what we are talking about' in relation to the joint creative process. Considering the reactions of the singers and the composers, we may have to adjust this idea. This, because the emancipation of the role of the singer brings about a change in thinking for composers and singers. And also for the conservatoires themselves, if what is intended is spreading this new way of thinking on a larger scale than that of a project. For a following project the role of *reflection* deserves closer attention: let the students think about 'why they are doing things the way they are doing them'. During the musical rehearsals of Bob Zimmerman these questions were certainly asked of the composers: why do (or don't) composers make certain choices? For the vocal students reflection about their role as singer could receive more specific consideration: do you want, as a singer, to be involved only in the interpretation and performance of the music, or do you want to play a more active role in the creative process? Do you perform a piece of music because you believe in it, or because you have been asked to by a teacher/composer/conductor? This approach allows students to turn the skills they are learning into knowledge. It is recommended to organise a reflection workshop during the working process, and to also conclude the project with this. Experience of the lectorate shows that it is important for students to first do something (or to see or experience something) and to then put this into a context. Reflection beforehand proves to be much less effective and tends to lead to misunderstanding for those involved. Naming learning moments afterwards can be part of the reflection for the student.

#### *Essence community opera*

Do the young singers and composers understand the essence of community opera now they have taken part in *The Operaflat*? It is hard to assess to which degree the values that are the basics of community opera are understood by the students. The students who were present during the meetings where everyone got to know each other on May 11 made contact with the pupils from the primary schools who wrote a libretto for them. The singers in their doorframes met countless numbers of visitors, who each reacted in their own way to the mini opera's that were performed under their noses. The students thought about text interpretation and about the use of space. The composers were asked to think about why they composed their piece in a certain way. All in all the students experienced many small pieces of the larger whole of community opera.

Of course the project consists of many more steps than those the students experienced. Heidweiller rightly notes that a whole phase went before the recruitment of the 'doors' and the writing of the libretti by the children. Interviews with the students show that by

the experience they gained from *The Operaflat* they got a better idea of the possibilities of a project like this and the role they themselves could play in it. Not for nothing all students indicate that they learned something from the project and almost half of them feels that the project gave them a fresh perspective of professional possibilities. It is encouraging that the students have the confidence to set up educational projects themselves in future. If only for this, the community opera project can be called a great success.

### **Points of recommendation**

Concluding, the evaluation suggests the following points of recommendation:

- Be more specific about what the core target of the project is;
- Organise taster workshops, in which the teachers and the students involved, together with the workshop leaders, work on the start of the project. From this they can come to a dialogue so they can express expectations and make agreements between Yo! Opera and the others involved.
- Give reflection a role in the project; the student has to gain insight into the why of the things he or she does, the decisions he or she makes in the process. This makes learning results more visible, which results in higher motivation.
- Create a bigger feeling of ownership among the students by giving them a greater say in the project and give the creative process a clearer role in the project. Make clear to the composers where the challenge lies in writing miniature and let them do more things together with the singers. An additional possibility is to let fewer composers write more compositions.
- Attention for the quality of coaching is important for supervising the student in his or her process; make sure there is adequate supervision in the starting process. Coaches should be aware of what is asked of the students and be prepared to help them.
- Have more contact with students and teachers during the working process. Make sure there is a more concrete description of the role of the conservatoires. Collect the expertise of the directors, to make a 'set of general skills'.
- Make sure there are workshops that strive for 'meaningful learning'. If you offer workshops, their contents should be related to that which the student is being trained for (there has to be an essential added value, which is meaningful to the student as singer, composer in training).
- Choose a project period that does not include a summer holiday.
- Make sure there is a better connection between the 'vocal signal' and the contents of the *The Operaflat*;
- Find new approaches for the first contact ('the lunch') with the primary school pupils.

## 5. Bibliography

Baarda, D., de Goede, M. & Teunissen, J. (1998). *Basisboek kwalitatief onderzoek: praktische handleiding voor het opzetten en uitvoeren van kwalitatief onderzoek*. Houten: Stenfert Kroese

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## **Appendix 1. In-depth-interview students**

### Assessment

- Can you describe what you thought of:
  - a) the improvisation workshops + lunch with child
  - b) the musical rehearsals with Bob Zimmerman
  - c) the direction rehearsals
  - d) (if applicable) the performance on November 3
- On a scale from 1-10 how successful did you think the project was? Why this grade?
- What did you think of the information and supervision from Yo!? Is there information you would have liked to have earlier in the project, or that you missed? Would you have liked to have more/less contact with Yo!? Why?
- What grade would you give Yo! for the organisation of the project? Why?
- Would you take part in a community art project a next time? Why (not)?

### Expectations and experiences

- Can you give a description of what was expected of you during the project?
- Did the image you had beforehand match with the final result? Were there parts during the process you had different expectations about? If so, how did you deal with this? Did you have the feeling there was room for your own creative input in the process?

### Commitment and ownership

- In how far do you have a feeling of ownership for the process?
- Did you attend all rehearsals?
- How do you feel about your own commitment? Did you put enough time in it (Did you have enough time)? Did you have previous experience with projects like these? (Do you think you would have had a different experience of the project if you had more experience? How?)

#### Cooperation / Emancipation creative process

- How did the cooperation between the vocal/composition student go? What would you have liked to see different? What could be improved for a next time? Singer: do you think you were involved enough in the creative process?
- Composition: did you pay specific attention to the connection between your composition and the singer and audience you wrote the piece for? If so, how was this expressed?

#### Incorporation of the project at the conservatoires

- In how far was the project part of the curriculum at the conservatoire? Did you receive enough support from the teachers? Are there elements that the teachers could have supervised better? Would you have liked support from other parties (different teachers, other workshops)?
- Do you think that this kind of project should become part of the curriculum (either as an optional subject or not)?

#### Professional possibilities

- Has this project changed your ideas about professional possibilities? If so, in what respect?

#### Learning moments

- What did you learn from the project?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thanks for your cooperation!!!

## **Appendix 2. Questionnaire students after the project**

1. Can you describe what you thought of:
  - e) the improvisation workshops + lunch with child
  - f) the musical rehearsals with Bob Zimmerman
  - g) the direction rehearsals
2. Do you have any tips for what might be improved or changed for a next time?
3. Did you attend all the meetings / rehearsals? If not, why not?
4. How did the cooperation go with the vocal/composition student? What could be improved / changed for a next time?
5. Composers: did you pay specific attention to a connection between your composition and the singer and the audience you wrote the piece for? If so, how was this expressed?
6. Did this project change your ideas about your professional possibilities? If so, in what respect?
7. What did you learn from the project?
8. Would you participate in a next project of Yo! Opera? Why (not)?
9. What grade on a scale from 1-10 would you give Yo! Opera for the organisation of the project? Why? What could be improved for a next time?
10. How successful do you rate the project on a scale from 1-10? Why this grade? What could be improved for a next time?

Thanks for your cooperation!!!

### **Appendix 3. Questionnaire teachers**

- Can you give a description of what was expected of you during the project? Did the idea you were given by Yo! Opera beforehand match with your experiences?
- To what extent was the project part of the curriculum at the conservatoire? How much room is there in the curriculum for community art projects such as these?
- Would you like to see community art projects integrated in the curriculum of conservatoire students? Why (not)?
- How important are projects like these for students, with an eye to their future profession?
- To what extent do you feel that you had an important contribution to the course of the project?
- How did the supervision of students at the conservatoire go? Do you think that the students needed support from the conservatoire for this project? Why (not)? What could be improved for a next time?
- What did you think of the information Yo! Opera gave you?
- Is there information you would have liked to have earlier in the project or that you missed?
- Do you feel that there was enough contact between Yo! Opera and the conservatoires? Can you explain this?
- Did you attend the performance in the flat on November 3? If so, how did you like it?
- On a scale from 1-10 how successful do you rate the project? Why this grade?
- Would you encourage students to participate in a project like this for a next time? Why (not)?

Thanks for your cooperation!!!



## **Appendix 4. Interview directors**

- How did it go today?
- What were your expectations? To what degree did these match with your experiences?
- What did you think of the supervision from Yo! Opera? Were there elements that could have been prepared / supervised better?
- Do you think the students understand the essence of community opera? Why do you think this is?

Thanks for your cooperation!!!

## **Appendix 5. Interview Yo! Opera**

- How do you think the project went?
- What did you want to achieve with this project? (a change of mentality?)
- Did you adjust your expectations during the course of the project?
  
- What role were the teachers supposed to play in the project?
- To what degree was there contact between the vocal and composition teachers? How did the cooperation go? Do you have the feeling there was enough contact? How happy are you about the commitment of the teachers?
  
- Do you think the students understand the essence of community opera? Did you notice a change in this?
  
- How do you think the cooperation between the vocal and composition students went?  
Was there a noticeable difference between the two groups of students?
- How happy are you with the commitment of the students? Do you think there was enough contact with the students?
  
- Can you indicate how happy you are with the information from Yo! Opera to the students? And to the teachers? What could be improved for a next time?
  
- What did you learn from the project?
  
- On a scale from 1-10 how successful did you think the project was? Why?
  
- What would you do in a different way next time?
  
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thanks for your cooperation!!!